

MLRA SOIL SURVEY PROJECT OFFICE CONCEPT

Revised 01/04/01

The Major Land Resources Areas (MLRA) concept for conducting project soil surveys was adopted by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in 1995 during the reinvention process. A QIP Team for Soil Survey in the Reinvented NRCS met in Lincoln, Nebraska on January 10-12, 1995 to address functions, organizational structure, and staffing for the reorganized Soil Survey. The rationale for the new MLRA concept and recommendations for its implementation are outlined in the Team Report entitled: "Soil Survey in the Reinvented Natural Resources Conservation Service", dated January 1995.

We believe the MLRA Project Office concept will be an important component of the Soil Survey Program of the future. This is an expanded or "super" office concept as compared to the normal existing soil survey project office structure, and will result in fewer and better-equipped offices. We can no longer afford to equip and maintain one- and two-person project offices. MO-13 has taken a lead role in implementing this concept by working with Ohio to develop an MLRA-126 Project Office in Marietta, Ohio. Other Regions are also moving forward with the idea. We believe the MLRA Project Office will:

- Enhance a safer and more professional environment for soil scientists working in the field;
- Make it easier and more economical to install and maintain the latest computers, digitizing and GIS equipment, communications networks, Global Positioning Systems, Digital Orthophotoquads, Digital Elevation Models, Satellite Imagery, etc;
- Provide an opportunity to co-locate and share equipment with other NRCS technical assistance and resource inventory offices;
- Provide an opportunity to locate on university campuses where possible—some could be small institutions or community colleges. The university's internet could be used and students could be employed part-time to assist in data gathering;
- Provide an excellent opportunity to use the MLRA concept to locate offices in areas without regard to state, county or other political boundaries; and
- Attract and maintain highly qualified staffs and provide an opportunity to employ specialists other than soil scientists such as GIS experts, foresters, soil conservationists, etc.

Institutionalizing the MLRA concept for production soil survey at the field level is an important priority of the Soil Survey Program. The Soil Survey Division will be working with the states, MLRA offices, and regions to ensure that this concept is implemented uniformly throughout the country, as resources become available.

MANAGEMENT INITIATIVES

The following list provides opportunities to increase efficiency and improve effectiveness of the soil survey program. (Implementation of all of these items in every MO would increase production by an estimated 5 to 10 percent.)

1. Adjust the number of ongoing surveys in the MLRA area to a number that can be completed in a 3 to 5 year period. Many of the soil surveys are understaffed.
2. Increase the use of less intensive soil survey for areas of less intensive land use. Design map units so that the amount of detail mapped will be adequate to meet the needs of the clients, but not more detail than they need. Soil surveys should be adequate for making the intended land use and management decisions.
3. Get mapping rates in line with the detail mapped. Higher mapping rates should be expected on lower intensity surveys, and on soil survey updates.
4. Do not start soil surveys until cartographic materials are available to send to the field. Transferring mapping from one set of maps to another is inefficient.
5. Do progressive correlation as soil survey progresses. Complete each area of the survey as you go, so you don't have to go back to that area again. This saves a great deal of time if the project leader happens to get transferred before the survey is completed. We have many completed soil surveys without a final correlation completed.
6. Keep map compilation and digitizing current with progressive correlation.
7. Do all project map compilation with field soil scientists. One of our biggest problems in map finishing and digitizing has been poor compilation.
8. Complete the first draft of the manuscript by the time of the comprehensive review.
9. Learn NASIS and use the report writer capability. This will save editing time, and increase your efficiency.
10. Make certain any needed laboratory data is obtained well ahead of final field review. Plan for about one year to get data back once the samples are taken.
11. Make full use of mapping aids such as color infra-red, all terrain vehicles, power probes, backhoes, GPS, GPR, etc. These are all effective tools.

12. Increase use of flexible work schedules and overtime where needed. These are cost-effective.